

26th August 2016

PRESS STATEMENT

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FOCUS ON REGIONAL RAW WATER SECURITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

PENANG, Friday (26/8/2016): Northern Region states in Malaysia should focus on the long-term security and sustainability of regional raw water resources instead of seeking unsubstantiated 'water profitability'.

It should be noted that Kedah is not 'supplying' raw water to Penang. Penang is drawing raw water from Sungai Muda, a river that defines the boundary between our two states. We use our own resources to draw water from our side of the river, downstream from 14 Syarikat Air Darul Aman (SADA) water treatment intakes and 1 Jabatan Pengairan dan Saliran (JPS) irrigation intake in Kedah.

As such, since 1973, Penang has not paid Kedah for the raw water that we draw from Sungai Muda daily under normal circumstances.

In the first 6 months of 2016, Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Perak experienced the challenges of a Super El Niño season. There was a threat of a widespread water crisis that would affect 4 million people and cause billions of ringgit in losses for thousands of businesses.

To avoid rationing in Penang, Perbadanan Bekalan Air Pulau Pinang Sdn Bhd (PBAPP) had to implement prudent dry weather controls. Meanwhile, there were incidences of rationing in the other Northern states.

When the effective capacities of the Beris Dam and Muda Dam (that were designed to release water into Sungai Muda during dry seasons) fell to critical levels, Penang had to make public recommendations to the Federal Government to postpone irrigation, implement large-scale cloud seeding and effectively manage daily drawdowns from these dams, while encouraging the people to save water.

Super El Niño has clearly reminded us that when dam reserves drop to critical levels, no amount of money can buy additional raw water reserves for Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Northern Perak in the short-term.

Until today, all key dams in the Northern Region have not fully recovered from the effects of Super El Niño. Looking ahead, we do not know when the next Super El Niño will hit us.

Prioritise Regional Water Solutions

Since May 2016, the Penang State Government and PBAPP have repeatedly called on the National Water Resources Council (MSAN), chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, to prioritise regional raw water solutions for the 4 northern region states.

Proposals which we have tabled and noted in official letters to MSAN include:

1. Immediately banning all logging activities in the Ulu Muda Catchments and gazetted these areas as water catchment areas protected by law.
2. Compensating Kedah with Federal funds to protect and preserve the Ulu Muda Catchments, after these areas are gazetted.
3. Implementing the Sungai Perak Raw Water Transfer Scheme (SPRWTS) in 5-7 years, so as to meet Perak and Penang's future raw water demand until Year 2050.
4. Allocating Federal funding for the SPRWTS for the benefit of two states, in accordance to the 2011 agreements signed between the Federal Government and the Penang State Government for Penang's migration to the National Water Services Restructuring Initiative (NWSRI).
5. Urging the Federal Government to play a more proactive and active role in protecting, managing and optimising all raw water resources in the Northern Region for the mutual benefit of Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Northern Perak, in line with the concept of the Northern Region Economic Corridor (NCER).

6. Preparing a water crisis management plan for the Northern Region, leveraging on all available raw water resources, to minimise the risks, threats and negative impact of future prolonged dry seasons.

Protect National Interests

There are around 4 million Malaysians living and working in Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Northern Perak. Since 2008, the Northern Corridor Implementation Authority (NCIA) has been promoting the NCER to become a world-class economic region as a whole, while ensuring social and sustainable development as well as economic growth.

In 2015, the 4 NCER states contributed to about 15.8% of the national GDP of RM1.012 trillion. On 13th August 2016, it was reported that the NCER netted RM4.47 billion in investments in the first 6 months of 2016.

Next week, on 31st August 2016, we will be celebrating Malaysia's 59th National Day to the theme of 'Sehati, Sejiwa'. Perhaps, it is a good time for everyone to reflect and focus on the importance of securing water supply sustainability in the NCER as a whole to protect national interests.

Water is an essential resource for daily life and sustainable development. Without water sufficiency, the NCER cannot progress further in a sustainable manner. As such, we need funding and action from the Federal Government now to protect the Ulu Muda Catchments and to optimise the potential of Sungai Perak as a regional raw water resource.

Thank You.

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